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# hi-fine GROUP TEST

Maybe it's time to treat yourself to a speaker that really delivers. Here we test and compare five key models that embody some of the most exciting new technologies in the field

## FLOORSTANDING LOUDSPEAKERS £1650-£2300

TESTED THIS MONTH

CABASSE JAVA MC40	£1739
DYNAUDIO EXCITE X34	£2000
SONUS FABER VENERE 2.5	£2298
TANNOY PRECISION 6.2	£1700
WHARFEDALE JADE 5	£1650



Cutting-edge gear, cherry-picked by the *Hi-Fi News* editor



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Craving a sound with all the sweep, drama, scale and intensity of your favourite music? Why not look to the most recent crop of highly-developed, high-tech floorstanding speakers? Manufacturers have been working harder than ever to give us a great full-range performance in speakers that are easier to site, easier to drive and easier on the eye than their predecessors.

Also, advances in design and economies in manufacturing have made today's speakers better value than ever, to the point where it nearly always makes more sense to go for a floorstander than a standmount. A floorstander need take up no more floor space, but it can include the extra cabinet volume needed to give really decent bass performance. So why spend money on stands which could be put towards a better speaker?

There's no longer really a downside. Back in the 1980s, especially in the UK, enthusiasts in search of a sound with real speed and attack reacted against the sluggish-sounding audio wardrobes of an earlier generation. They

plumped instead for ever-tinier mini-monitors perched on ever more elaborate and expensive stands. Since then, you could say that sanity has prevailed, as designers have found ways to make sure that bigger, taller speakers can sound just as agile as small standmounts.

All the speakers in this group test set out to offer the essence of high-end sound in an acceptably-sized package, but the design approaches used are as fascinatingly diverse as their national origins. For example, Cabasse makes good use of its coaxial drive units and retains the traditional French preference for high sensitivity, while Dynaudio sacrifices efficiency for neutrality. Tannoy offers the latest and most refined version of its classic Dual Concentric driver, while Sonus faber and Wharfedale can boast effective use of new materials and new constructional methods.

### A RANGE OF MUSIC TRACKS

We used a wide range of music to put these speakers through their paces. For a start, there was the always illuminating Marta Gomez *Entre Cada Palabra* [Chesky JD301],

with its vast church acoustic and intricate percussion sounds.

Then there was a true classic of rock production, Jennifer Warnes' *Famous Blue Raincoat* [Classic RTHCD 5052], while male vocals were represented by Eric Bibb's *Get On Board* [Telarc CD-83675] and Bob Dylan's *Blood On The Tracks* [Columbia 512350]. Coming more up to date, it was fascinating to hear how the speakers fared with Florence And The Machine's *Lungs*, [Island/Moshi Moshi].

Our inevitable jazz classic was *Art Pepper Meets The Rhythm Section*, the saxophonist's 1957 recording with what was then three-fifths of the Miles Davis quintet, Red Garland, Paul Chambers and Philly Joe Jones [Contemporary/Original Jazz Classics S7532]. Finally, we sampled Fauré's *Requiem*, a 1986 recording made in the Henry Wood Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and London Symphony Chorus under Richard Hickox [Carlton Classics 30366 00092]. It also features Aled Jones, then the supreme boy treble. ↻

REVIEWS BY STEVE HARRIS  
LAB REPORTS BY KEITH HOWARD

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# Cabasse Java MC40

Launched a few years ago now, the MC40 series was the first to bring Cabasse's signature coaxial drive unit technology, the Spatially Coherent System [SCS], to speakers in a moderate price range.

With a dome tweeter at the centre, SCS units can provide two-, three- and even four-way coaxial combinations, the surrounding annular lower-frequency diaphragms curving rearward like extensions of the dome, to give a spherical radiation pattern. In the Java's SCS tweeter/midrange unit, a midrange diaphragm measuring 85mm in diameter forms a ring around a 25mm polyester-dome tweeter.

Below this are two 170mm bass units connected in parallel, making this a three-way system. Like the midrange diaphragm above, the woofer cones are made of Duocell, an exclusive processing of Rohacell foam material, which first appeared in Cabasse speakers back in 1985.

With curved, non-parallel sides to avoid standing waves, the cabinet is built of MDF with a varying wall thickness of up to 31mm. Bass loading is via a flared port exiting vertically from the bottom. With the cabinet supported on short pillars from the plinth, radiation from the port emerges all round, close to the floor. Screw-in spikes are provided.

Amplifier connection is via a single pair of sturdy 4mm socket/binding posts, with no provision for bi-wiring. Finishes are gloss black, gloss white and dark oak.

## FOOT-TAPPING

Listening, we heard a bright, lively sound that soon turned out to be quite foot-tapping on Marta Gomez's 'Maria Mulata', with its incisive handclaps, although other percussion sounds lacked detail compared with, say, the Tannoy. On the Jennifer Warnes album, that impeccable voice seemed to suffer a slightly tunnel-like coloration, the

drummer's offbeats rather spiky, while the bass seemed softened. Even so, the music again seemed to rock along well.

That complex ensemble in Eric Bibb's 'Spirit I Am' track sounded a little messy, while the bass seemed ill-defined. Yet Dylan's 'Tangled Up In Blue' got our feet tapping again, with the vocal clear and upfront.

'Dog Days Are Over' started off well with a great vocal sound from Florence, though limitations were heard in the complexities of the mix. The big bass drum could have done with more definition and wallop.

Art Pepper's sax sound was conveyed well, perhaps by the same presence effect that had helped vocalists on other material. However, on the Fauré, the choral sound was coarsened compared with the other speakers, while the orchestral sound lacked bass weight.

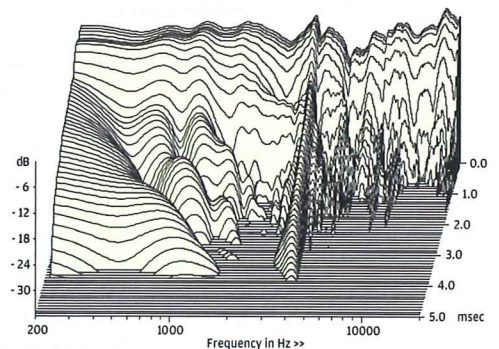
Sound Quality: 75%



## LAB REPORT

Cabasse claims a high 90dB sensitivity for the MC40 but our measured pink noise figure of 91.0dB was even higher. While the claimed 3.4ohm minimum impedance is incompatible with the nominal 8ohm, it is close to the 3.3ohm minimum we obtained. Impedance phase angles are well enough controlled that the EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) fell to a low of 2.1ohm at 116Hz – good for this group – but it remained less than 2.3ohm all the way from 250Hz to 660Hz, so the MC40 is still a challenging load.

On-axis response errors of  $\pm 5.6$ dB and  $\pm 5.8$ dB indicate the unevenness of the output around an essentially flat trend, while the pair matching error of  $\pm 4.0$ dB – highest in the group – doesn't bode well for stereo image precision. Bass extension ( $-6$ dB at 67Hz, re. 200Hz) suffers because of the high sensitivity and the CSD waterfall [see Graph] shows a strong resonance at about 3.5kHz. KH



Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	92.5dB / 91.0dB / 90.5dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	3.3ohm @ 179Hz 16.2ohm @ 1.2kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	$-36^\circ$ @ 101Hz $49^\circ$ @ 814Hz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 4.0$ dB
LF/HF extension ( $-6$ dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	67Hz / 31.4kHz/24.2kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.5% / 0.2% / 0.6%
Dimensions (HWD)	1100x250x350mm

# Dynaudio Excite X34

Despite its range name, the Excite X34 is intended to be 'particularly discreet'. It's the smallest speaker in this group and the only one without any curves in its cabinet, which is finished in an unassertive Satin Black, rather than a showy gloss lacquer. But it's also available in Satin White and Rosewood or Walnut veneers.

As the smaller of two floorstanders in the Excite range, the X34 looks like a grown-up version of the standmount X14, which has a 30m soft-dome tweeter plus a single 130mm Magnesium Silicate Polymer [MSP] bass/mid driver.

For the X34, Dynaudio has added a second 130mm MSP unit, and the speaker is bass-reflex-loaded with a slightly flared port in the back of the cabinet. Foam bungs are supplied, which can be fitted to the ports if room conditions make it desirable to attenuate the low bass output. The strong metal base with outrigger feet at the corners is equipped with adjustable spikes.

All drive units feature Dynaudio's usual aluminium voice coils and large, powerful magnet systems. There is no provision for bi-wiring, because, as the company firmly puts it, 'Dividing the frequency sections through bi-wiring or bi-amping is neither beneficial nor optional.'

## NEUTRAL TERRITORY

From the start, the Dynaudio offered an attractively neutral presentation, restrained by comparison with any of the other speakers. It had most in common with the Tannoy, though without the latter's overtly ear-catching treble detail. It had a deeper bass the Tannoy, and although this was light compared with the other two models, it made up for this with poise and accuracy.

With Marta Gomez, there was an attractive, velvety quality to the voice, and a sense of air around it. Treble sounds were free of

exaggerated sibilants or spittiness and could even seem smoothed-off. Drums and percussion sounds had a natural quality, though without any great sense of attack or zest. Background vocals were clean and free of any muddle.

On Warnes' 'First We Take Manhattan' the speaker revealed all the colour and power of Stevie Ray's masterful lead guitar, and there was a good combination of sweetness and lifelike ambience. With Eric Bibb's 'Spirit I Am' the evocative sounds in that picture-painting mix worked really well too.

From the Art Pepper album the speaker extracted a really good piano sound, while the bass here had acceptable weight and wasn't sluggish. With the Fauré, the choir had a convincing sense of location, clarity in its different sections and a sweetness to the treble sound.

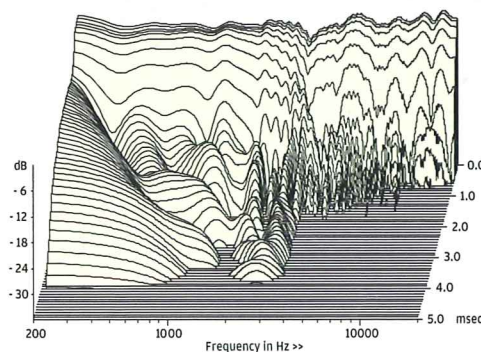
Sound Quality: 80%



## LAB REPORT

As the X34 is the smallest speaker here it's no surprise that it has the lowest specified sensitivity of 86dB, but our pink noise figure of 83.7dB indicates that even this is optimistic. Payback comes in the form of a very amp-friendly load, the minimum impedance modulus of 6.8ohm justifying the 8ohm nominal figure while the well-controlled phase angles result in a minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) of 4.2ohm at 323Hz – comfortably the highest in this group.

The X34 also scored in having the flattest frequency response with commendable error figures of just  $\pm 3.2$ dB and  $\pm 3.1$ dB respectively (200Hz to 20kHz). Pair matching error of  $\pm 1.2$ dB isn't quite as impressive but still equal-best here. Bass extension was competitive at 55Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) and the cumulative spectral decay waterfall [see Graph] shows a fast initial energy decay with resonances kept to an impressively low level. KH



Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	84.3dB / 83.7dB / 83.4dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	6.8ohm @ 190Hz 25.9ohm @ 1.2kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-31° @ 2.1kHz 35° @ 498Hz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 1.2$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	55Hz / 30.0kHz/29.2kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.5% / 0.2% / 0.1%
Dimensions (HWD)	959x200x290mm

# Sonus faber Venere 2.5



Like the other models in this new series, the Venere 2.5 is visually every inch a Sonus faber. It's built into a superbly-finished lute-shaped cabinet, made more striking by the angled top in tempered glass. The same material is used for the stand, which is really an integral part of the design. As well as giving greater stability to this tall speaker, when fitted with its spiked feet the stand provides a tilt, said to bring the drivers into time alignment.

The drive unit line-up starts with a German-made DKM 29mm silk dome tweeter, its housing forming a vestigial horn. Below this comes a pair of 180mm drivers, featuring Sonus faber's proprietary Curv cone material. Curv starts life as a textile woven from polypropylene fibres of carefully-chosen thickness and section, which is heated in a mould to form the permanent cone shape.

These two units are identical, but this is a two-and-a-half-way design, so they don't cover the same frequency range. The upper 180mm driver is a bass/mid that crosses over directly to the tweeter, while the second unit is brought in at a lower crossover frequency and is strictly a woofer. Its output is reflex loaded by the slot-shaped port at the foot of the cabinet front.

Along with the gloss black lacquer seen here, the Venere 2.5 is available in gloss white or wood veneer, the latter at extra cost.

## POWERFUL BASS

Playing our familiar tracks through the Venere 2.5, it was quickly obvious that this model gave a fuller, more powerful bass than the Dynaudio or Tannoy, and even the Cabasse. Yet even on the bass-heavy Marta Gomez track, 'Maria Mulata', it was quite well controlled and in proportion. There was a beguiling sweetness brought to the vocals, and a good feeling of performers placed in the soundstage.

The strong bass helped to really drive the Warnes track along, while the drummer's high-energy slashing offbeat was quick and natural-sounding, never mechanical. Warnes' vocal soared effortlessly, even when the keyboard sounds powered in. In 'Bird On A Wire' those massive tom-tom sounds had real texture, and the bass backing voices had real depth.

Bibb's 'Spirit I Am' was truly impressive, the vocal vibrant and intense and the powerful, monolithic notes of the simple bass part holding sway without swamping everything. Not surprisingly, this speaker could do full justice to the big drum sound on Florence's 'Dog Days' too.

Warm and intimate, the Art Pepper disc sounded almost as if it were recorded yesterday, while the Fauré recording came over with a great sense of scale and gravitas.

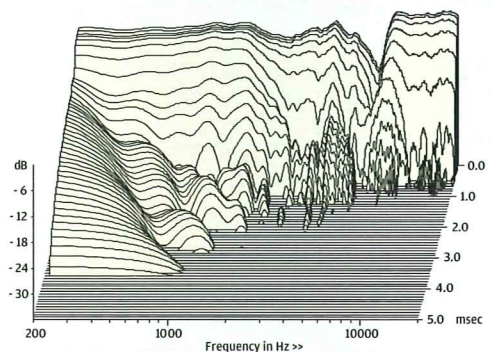
Sound Quality: 85%



## LAB REPORT

Sonus faber offers no specification of sensitivity or impedance for the Venere range but our measurements of pink noise sensitivity (88.2dB) and minimum modulus (3.5ohm) indicate that 88dB and 4ohm nominal are appropriate figures. Impedance phase angles are moderate so the minimum EPDR is a relatively amplifier friendly 2.1ohm at 90Hz but there are other dips to 2.2ohm at 464Hz and 2.3ohm at 39Hz.

On-axis response errors are high at  $\pm 6.4$ dB and  $\pm 6.6$ dB principally because of a deep but narrow notch at about 7.5kHz, followed by shelved up output in the octave above 10kHz. Pair matching was average at  $\pm 1.4$ dB but bass extension the best in group at 30Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz), albeit with a steep roll-off thereafter. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [see Graph] shows fast energy decay across the spectrum and no resonance associated with the 7.5kHz response notch. KH



Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms - Mean/IEC/Music)	89.4dB / 88.2dB / 87.6dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	3.5ohm @ 113Hz 33.8ohm @ 3.2kHz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz-20kHz)	-37° @ 79Hz 55° @ 1.6kHz
Pair matching (200Hz-20kHz)	$\pm 1.4$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	30Hz / 34.0kHz/33.4kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.5% / 0.2% / 0.6%
Dimensions (HWD)	1107x340x437mm

# Tannoy Precision 6.2

**F**or the Precision range, Tannoy has introduced a new 150mm (6in) version of the Dual Concentric driver, which also implements Tannoy's WideBand philosophy as the 25mm titanium tweeter gives a frequency response that extends well beyond 20kHz. Tannoy's Tulip WaveGuide blends the tweeter output into the flare of the surrounding 150mm bass/mid cone, which handles frequencies up to 1.6kHz. Though it looks metallic, the cone is of treated paper pulp, with a rubber surround.

Completing the driver array in the 6.2 is an additional 150mm bass unit, using the same cone material and boasting a 44mm diameter edge-wound voice coil. The system is reflex-loaded by a rear-facing port.

With just a graceful curve to the sides to reduce internal standing waves, the cabinets use a heavyweight fibreboard construction with internal bracing and a combination of materials for damping in what Tannoy calls DMT, or Differential Material Technology. A solid base plate with outrigger feet provides for screw-in spikes.

There's also provision for mass-loading, by filling a cavity in the bottom of the cabinet with sand. Tannoy's speaker terminal array offers the option of bi-wiring along with a grounding terminal that can be used to connect the chassis parts of the speaker to the hi-fi system ground. As well as gloss black, the speakers are available in gloss or satin finished walnut veneers.

## **RELAXED CLARITY**

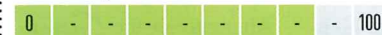
On audition, the Precision 6.2 could seem light and dry rather than full-bodied compared with the Wharfedale, for example, yet it was welcoming and appealing too. It was excellent on the gallery of percussion in 'Maria Mulata', holding everything together cleanly behind the singer. You could really feel the relaxed clarity of Jennifer Warnes'

vocal in 'First We Take Manhattan', for example. And with plenty of mid/treble detail, you could appreciate the ensemble build-up in Eric Bibb's 'Spirit I Am', all the guest voices and horns laid out clearly.

With Florence's 'Dog Days', the big drum wasn't as big as it could be with the Sonus faber or Wharfedale. But the revelation of small details opened up the music in a different and even an exhilarating way. Florence's vocal did take on a slight extra edge at the top, though.

Art Pepper's sax became really gripping, and Garland's piano intense even if not as natural as with the Dynaudio or as warm as with the Sonus faber. With the Fauré, there was a fine orchestral sound, the choir full-throated in their crescendos, and beautiful in the soft passages. Orchestra, organ and singers all had space around them.

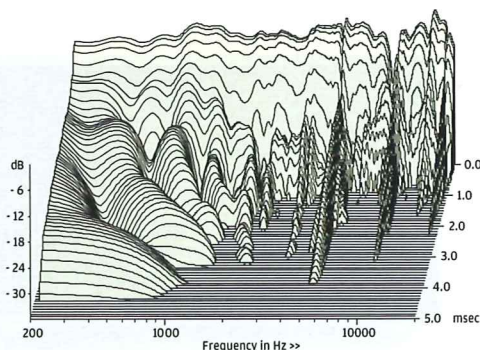
Sound Quality: 80%



## **LAB REPORT**

Tannoy specifies 89dB sensitivity for the Precision 6.2 but our pink noise figure of 90.0dB suggests this is conservative. Minimum impedance modulus of 2.9ohm makes a mockery of the 8ohm nominal rating, though. Impedance phase angles are large enough to drop the EPDR to a low of 1.5ohm at 106Hz with another dip to 1.8ohm at 41Hz, so the Precision 6.2 is quite a tough load.

The on-axis frequency response is a rollercoaster in the upper treble with error figures of  $\pm 6.5$ dB and  $\pm 5.4$ dB. Pair matching was also poor at  $\pm 2.4$ dB but the largest disparities occur around 10kHz and are narrowband. Bass extension of 39Hz ( $-6$ dB re. 200Hz) is good but flattered by unevenness in the response resulting from the length mode of the enclosed air at around 190Hz. The bass response is 6dB down at 58Hz (re. 300Hz) – a more relevant figure. The CSD waterfall shows a series of high-Q treble resonances. KH



<b>Sensitivity</b> (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	90.6dB / 90.0dB / 90.2dB
<b>Impedance modulus min/max</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	2.9ohm @ 120Hz 30.0ohm @ 3.1kHz
<b>Impedance phase min/max</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	$-47^\circ$ @ 92Hz $51^\circ$ @ 2.0kHz
<b>Pair matching</b> (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 2.4$ dB
<b>LF/HF extension</b> ( $-6$ dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	39Hz / 35.3kHz / >40kHz
<b>THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz</b> (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.5% / 0.4% / 1.0%
<b>Dimensions</b> (HWD)	1000x310x283mm

# Wharfedale Jade 5



In this visually striking speaker, the tweeter and midrange are embraced in a combination housing that's common to all the Jade models, raising the axis of the tweeter's 25mm aluminium dome to peep above the front edge of the curved, sloping cabinet top.

While the midrange has a 75mm concave aluminium/pulp diaphragm, the twin 165mm bass units use a new cone material called Acufibre, said to 'marry the responsiveness of glass and carbon fibre' in a self-damping woven matrix. They are impressed with a moulded pattern to break up standing waves.

The Jade cabinets are made from laminations of wood and a composite material, Crystalam. These layers reduce the 'Q' of panel resonance peaks and also spread resonances over a wider frequency range. Bass loading is described as Aperiodic, with a resistive acoustic filter rather than the usual simple reflex port.

Ports in the bottom of the cabinet are tuned by the slot formed by the small gap between cabinet and plinth, this being filled with resistive foam to control the airflow from the ports.

Bi-wiring terminals are provided, and the plinth comes with ready-fitted spikes along with optional seats for use on wood floors. Veneer finish options are the Black Oak seen here, Vintage Cherry and Rosewood, and they are also available in Piano Black or Burgundy Burr lacquer.

### NATURALLY INVITING

Natural timbres and an inviting soundstage were in evidence here. With the Wharfedale Jade 5, you felt that acoustic instruments could bloom unforced in a presentation that was always relaxed and almost never strident.

With Marta Gomez there was good depth in the acoustic, and the bass seemed natural and articulate. The vocal was sweet and plaintive,

while the flute seemed to take flight with real air around it.

On *Famous Blue Raincoat* the sound was smooth, glossy and detailed, yet strangely here I felt that the bass was less admirable, even tending to sound one-notey.

In Eric Bibb's 'Spirit I Am' the Jade 5 let you really hear into the mix, all the incidental voices and instruments clearly placed. 'Tangled Up In Blue' had the same kind of clarity, with Dylan's vocal full of character, energy and life.

The speaker seemed to reveal fresh nuances in Florence's 'Dog Days...' vocal too, and here once more there was an inviting clarity. The big drum was reasonably convincing, though it lacked the weight delivered by the Sonus faber.

With Art Pepper, the sound was open and easy-going, seemingly well free of the speaker boxes too.

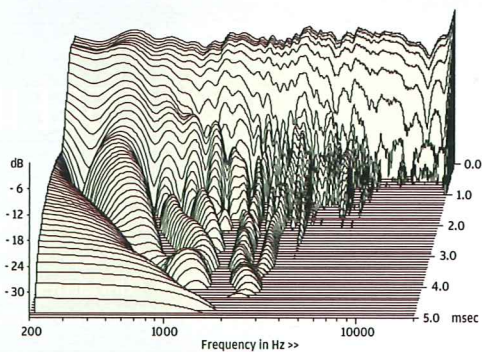
Sound Quality: 83%



### LAB REPORT

Wharfedale's claim of 87dB sensitivity for the Jade 5 looks a little optimistic given our measured pink noise figure of 85.8dB, while the nominal impedance of 6ohm is given a minimum modulus of 2.7ohm. Poorly controlled impedance phase angle results in the EPDR dipping to a minimum of 1.2ohm at 73Hz – a pretty scary figure for a speaker in this price range.

However, the on-axis frequency response (200Hz-20kHz) is more even than the  $\pm 5.4$ dB and  $\pm 5.7$ dB errors suggest, these resulting primarily from a rising response above 15kHz caused by the breakup resonance of the metal dome tweeter occurring only just above 20kHz. Pair matching of  $\pm 1.2$ dB, over the same frequency range, is OK if not top-notch. Bass extension of 57Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz) is typical of the group. Initial energy decay is fast in the CSD waterfall [see Graph] but breakup resonances are clearly visible at lower treble frequencies. KH



Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	86.3dB / 85.8dB / 86.0dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	2.7ohm @ 91Hz 12.5ohm @ 42Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-57° @ 56Hz 39° @ 1.7kHz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	$\pm 1.2$ dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	57Hz / >40kHz/>40kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL at 1m)	0.6% / 0.3% / 0.1%
Dimensions (HWD)	1055x246x400mm

# GROUP TEST VERDICT

• CD PLAYERS • TURNTABLES • CARTRIDGES • **LOUDSPEAKERS** • AMPLIFIERS • HEADPHONES • STREAMERS •

Listening to this very varied group of loudspeakers proved thoroughly enjoyable, and if it's hard to sum up the results, that's only because all of them have a lot to offer. It's intriguing that each of the five comes from a range that covers both stereo and multichannel needs (including a centre channel); while in each case it's the smaller of the two floorstanders in the range.

In every instance, it seems, the manufacturer has tried to offer a speaker that's a big enough step up from the standmount to give real long-term satisfaction, but one that will be more versatile than its larger brother in room placement and use. Only if you have a very big room will you need to head straight for the senior models.

## DIFFERENT QUALITIES

All the speakers tested are technically interesting in one way or another, but none more so than the Cabasse MC40 Java, even though this is in fact the oldest design here. With its special coaxial mid/tweeter system and high sensitivity approach, this speaker offers a rather different presentation from the expected UK norm. It was always lively and often exciting, with a real foot-tapping quality, yet by comparison with others in the group it could sound a little bright, or even ragged, and it didn't excel in extracting fine inner detail. Nonetheless, we experienced an enjoyable sound.

By contrast, the Tannoy Precision 6.2 lives up to its name, with an arresting ability to pick out fine detail in the mid and treble. It could sound a little bass-light, especially compared with the bigger models in the group, but its unexaggerated

bottom-end sound had a quickness and sense of detail that helped the music to remain lightfooted and hang together. It could actually be a great choice in a smaller room, especially for someone who wants pin-sharp detail.

Dynaudio's Excite X34 always sounded smooth and neutral, with a soft and refined top end. If played after the Tannoy it could sound almost dull by comparison, but it did not really lack detail. Though not impressively powerful, its bass sound was impeccably correct and tuneful, making for enjoyable long-term listening. Once again, an excellent speaker, which will work well in relatively confined spaces.

## THE TOP CHOICES

With the Jade range, it seems that Wharfedale has thrown every possible new technology and material into the design,

and still aimed to offer more speaker for the money than its competitors. So the Jade 5 is physically almost the

largest speaker here, although it's also the least expensive. Its rather Odeon-like styling may suggest that it is primarily aimed at home theatre users, but it does have a lot to offer on music.

On most material its relatively weighty bottom end provides a good foundation, yet there were times when the bass didn't seem convincingly *accurate*

**RIGHT:** While the Sonus faber Venere 2.5 [left] had the deepest bass and an impressively grand manner, Wharfedale's Jade 5 sounded warm, musical and inviting

at all. Its great strength, though, is an inviting, effortless midrange and treble quality that tempts you to carry on listening.

Finally, we come to the Sonus faber Venere 2.5, approximately the same size as the Jade 5 but a very different design – and also by contrast quite easily the most expensive speaker in the group.

It also has the largest bass units and it undeniably produces the deepest and weightiest bass of any model here, matched by an impressive and often majestic sound overall. With its distinctive styling and unique brand cachet, the Venere 2.5 is clearly a winner. ☺

*'Its Odeon-like styling might suggest home theatre intent'*



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